



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



## **Topic: Re-invigorated Business Recycling Program**

**Date: Friday, January 11, 2008; Location: Amgen, West Greenwich**

In an effort to increase recycling in the business sector, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is re-initiating a commercial recycling program to help businesses comply with the State's mandatory recycling law and to help preserve landfill capacity.

The first phase of the new approach gets underway this week with more than 2,300 businesses soon receiving a letter from DEM requesting information about their waste stream and recycling efforts via a new on-line reporting system at [www.ri.gov](http://www.ri.gov). The letter includes a user identification and PIN number that will allow access to the system and the ability to enter data. DEM will use the data to gauge the current level of recycling, to identify what's working well and where improvements are needed, and to track recycling progress. The results will be published in an annual report. In addition, key information will be incorporated into the second phase, a joint DEM and Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) sector-by-sector education and compliance assistance program which is set to begin in late spring.

Rhode Island businesses generate approximately 60% of the waste buried in the State Central Landfill, or about 700,000 tons a year. Despite a law requiring businesses to recycle, the commercial sector recycling rate is estimated to be less than 3%<sup>1</sup>. Sooner than we think, Rhode Island will be faced with siting and developing a new landfill or other type of waste disposal facility or exporting waste out of state. These alternatives are more expensive than the current system so the remaining capacity of the Central Landfill is a resource that the State must use very carefully.



**Rhode Island Resource Recovery's Central Landfill receives more than 1.1 Million tons of trash each year.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Rhode Island Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan, State Guide Plan Element 171*, Rhode Island Resource Recovery Program, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program.

Under the commercial recycling law all businesses are required to recycle. Department regulations define 17 materials that must be recycled and require businesses with 50 or more employees to submit a source reduction and recycling plan, implement that plan, and report annually on the progress. The regulations also prohibit solid waste facilities from accepting loads of commercial waste containing more than 20 percent of recyclables.

The planning and reporting process defined in the regulations and as previously implemented proved to be resource intensive for businesses. Recycling cost and convenience issues also prevented them from fully complying with program requirements. The new program, with an automated reporting system and a more flexible sector-based business assistance component, aims to address these issues.

### **Commercial Recycling Success Story**

Despite the previous onerous process, some Rhode Island companies managed to succeed in establishing viable recycling programs. Amgen is an excellent example. The company has staff members dedicated to recycling efforts. Last year, Amgen Rhode Island recycled almost 2 million pounds of material from approximately 50 different waste streams, which include the 17 that are mandated by the current state regulations. And that's not just paper and plastic, but includes steel and other metals, wood pallets, even kitchen grease. The result – a savings last year of almost \$50,000 in solid waste disposal costs alone. Last year, Amgen recycled:

- Enough paper to save more than 1,100 trees
- Enough cardboard to save 800 cubic yards of landfill space
- Enough metal to equal the weight of approximately 40 automobiles

### **Interviews:**

- Terry Gray, PE, Assistant Director for Air, Waste and Compliance, DEM/Bureau of Environmental Protection, provided an overview of the new commercial recycling program and why it's needed.
- James Rawley, Associate, Environmental Health and Safety, Amgen, provided details on Amgen's recycling program



**James Rawley, Amgen Environmental Health and Safety Associate, demonstrates DEM's new on-line reporting system for Channel 10.**



**Channel 10 Reporter R.J. Heim interview's Terry Gray.**